

Why do we preserve trees?

Trees contribute to Bellevue's visual character and its ecosystem. Trees oxygenate the air, provide food and habitat for small animals and microorganisms, and reduce the impacts of storm water runoff. They enhance the visual appearance of the community, promote better transition between land uses, and help protect property values. Although trees can be removed and replaced with new plantings, it takes years or decades for young trees to reach maturity and match the benefits of existing trees.

Must all trees be preserved?

No. The city recognizes that existing trees and new development compete for space. Since both are crucial to the Bellevue's vitality, the Land Use Code (LUC) seeks to balance the needs of the two. The LUC allows new development to occur but sets requirements for new landscaping and the preservation of existing trees (and sometimes other vegetation) that the new development must satisfy.

The type, amount, and location of existing vegetation that must be preserved depends on whether the site lies inside or outside of the Downtown, whether the site is within a Transition Area Design District (TADD), whether the site contains critical areas, and other considerations discussed below.

What development must preserve trees?

Tree preservation requirements apply to all new development, including but not limited to subdivisions, short subdivisions, and planned unit developments, *except*:

- Development within the Downtown
- Single-family residential permits, unless restrictions on tree removal were imposed through prior city approval, such as subdivision conditions.

What trees must be preserved?

Perimeter Landscape Area. If the Land Use Code requires your development to provide a perimeter landscape area, you must preserve all "significant" trees within that landscape area that will not constitute a safety hazard. A significant tree is any healthy tree 8" or greater in diameter, measured 4' above existing grade. Areas devoted to access, utilities, sidewalks, and similar needs are exempt from this requirement.

Site Interior. In the remainder of the site, at least 15% of the total diameter inches of all significant trees must be preserved. This means that each significant tree in the site interior is measured, and the diameters are added together for a total. The combined diameters of the trees to be preserved must equal at least 15% of that total.

Are all significant trees given equal weight?

No. In applying the site interior rule described above, the diameters of Alder and Cottonwood trees may be discounted by 50%.

Preservation priority is given to significant trees which:

- Are over 60' in height;
- Form a continuous canopy;
- Contribute to the character of the environment and do not constitute a safety hazard;
- Provide winter wind protection or summer shade;
- Are in a group that creates a distinctive skyline feature; and
- Are in areas of steep slopes or adjacent to watercourses or wetlands.

What if I preserve more trees than required?

You may qualify for a reduced parking bonus. Parking may be reduced by up to 10% of the required amount if adequate parking will remain on the site and if land area for the required number of spaces remains available in case those spaces need to be constructed in the future.

Can I preserve non-significant trees?

The Land Use Code requirements are minimums. Additional tree preservation is at your option, whether or not those trees are significant. In some cases, preserving a group of non-significant trees and its understory vegetation can be approved as a contribution toward the significant tree preservation requirement.

What if my project is in a Transition Area Design District?

Properties in a TADD have additional requirements for perimeter landscaping areas. A greater perimeter landscape area might incorporate additional significant trees, thereby increasing the preservation requirements.

Along any street frontage or property line abutting a district receiving transition, all significant trees within 15' of the property line must be retained.

What if my project is in the Critical Areas Overlay District?

In the Critical Areas Overlay District, existing vegetation can be counted in some cases in lieu of new landscaping.

If the site contains critical areas, vegetation may be required to be retained in a Native Growth Protection Area (NGPA) or Retained Vegetation Area (RVA). NGPAs and RVAs often extend beyond the limits of a required perimeter landscape area, may or may not contain significant trees, and include understory vegetation.

Do any other districts have special tree preservation requirements?

The Evergreen Highlands Design District (LUC 20.25F) requires that, where practical, the tree line and trees over 6" in diameter must be preserved.

Is there flexibility to these requirements?

If an Alternative Landscape Option (ALO) per LUC 20.20.520.J is proposed, a modification of tree preservation and other landscape requirements may be requested. The ALO must satisfy certain criteria to be approved. A modification of the tree preservation requirements requires that the proposal either incorporates the retention of significant trees equal in number to what would otherwise be required or incorporates the retention of other natural vegetation in consolidated locations, which promotes the natural vegetated character of the site.

How are trees preserved?

Through the permitting process, the director of Planning & Community Development will identify tree protection measures which must be followed during land alteration and construction in order to ensure the continued health of the retained trees.

Where can I get additional information?

- Handout L-8, Tree Removal
- Handout L-10, Calculating Building Height in a Transition Area Design District
- Handout L-16, Landscape Development
- Handout L-27a, Tree Preservation in Bridle Trails R-1 zone
- LUC 20.20.520, Tree Preservation and Landscape Development
- LUC 20.25F.040.C.2, Evergreen Highlands Design District Landscape Requirements

This document is intended to provide guidance in applying certain Land Use Code regulations and is for informational use only. It cannot be used as a substitute for the Land Use Code or for other city codes, such as the Construction Codes. Additional information is available from Development Services at Bellevue City Hall or on the city website at www.bellevuewa.gov.

For land use regulations that may apply to your project, contact the Land Use Information Desk in Development Services. Phone: 425-452-4188. E-mail: landusereview@ci.bellevue.wa.us. Assistance for the hearing impaired: dial 711.
